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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MEXICO 001150

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TREASURY FOR IA (RACHEL JARPE, ANNA JEWEL)
NSC FOR RICHARD MILES, DAN FISK

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [ECON](#) [ELAB](#) [MX](#)
SUBJECT: MEXICAN PRESIDENT CALLS FOR OVERHAUL OF
EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

REF: A. MEXICO 1133
[B](#). MEXICO 1049
[C](#). 06 MEXICO 5854

Summary

[1](#). (SBU) Mexican President Felipe Calderon and teacher union leader Elba Esther Gordillo Morales this week agreed to work together to pass much-needed educational reform. Specific reform proposals have not been announced, only general calls to improve ways to evaluate teachers, teacher training, and school-related infrastructure. Local press reports say the government and the teachers union will meet to discuss what issues will be included in the reform later this year. While local commentators all agree on the need for educational reform, some have expressed concern that Gordillo has too much influence over Calderon for a comprehensive reform to be approved. End Summary.

Step Forward on Educational Reform

[2](#). (SBU) While at the launch of this year's National Evaluation of Academic Achievement in Schools (ENLACE) on April 14, President Felipe Calderon called for measures to improve the performance of Mexico's lackluster educational system. Calderon had met with the Secretary of Education, Josefina Vazquez, and the President the National Teachers Union (SNTE), Elba Esther Gordillo Morales, earlier this month to encourage them to reach agreement on educational reform (Ref B). A member of Calderon's "social cabinet" told Econoffs after this meeting took place that the politically powerful Gordillo "was well disposed to cooperate" in this effort -- a message that the union leader has worked to reinforce via public statements. Indeed, on April 14 Gordillo remarked that an overhaul of the educational system was needed to avoid perpetuating "conditions of inequality and exclusion." Though many would vehemently disagree with this assertion, Gordillo added that the SNTE is not an

obstacle to reform, but rather a key actor in the "educational transformation."

13. (U) Specific reform proposals have not been announced, only general calls to improve ways to evaluate teachers, teacher training, and school-related infrastructure. Local press reports say that the SEP, Social Development Secretariat, and SNTE will meet to discuss what issues will

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be included in the reform after the ENLACE test results are released later this year. (Note: ENLACE is a survey that evaluates the performance of all students and schools in Mexico. End Note.)

14. (SBU) While local commentators all agree on the need for educational reform, some have expressed concern that Gordillo has too much influence over Calderon (given her support for him during the July 2006 presidential elections) for a sufficiently comprehensive reform to be approved. The press has latched onto how much Calderon praises Gordillo in public, a treatment he does not afford to other union leaders or members of his cabinet. Some even have expressed concern that the reform will only end up strengthening the teachers union -- something Post believes the Calderon administration will not allow.

SEP and SNTE Conclude Wage Negotiations

15. (SBU) Gordillo said publicly that the SNTE's wage negotiations with the SEP were concluded to her satisfaction.

According to a SEP press release, the teachers received a 4.5% salary hike, a 0.3% salary "supplement," and a 1% increase in benefits. Moreover, the government agreed to

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channel 550 million pesos for teacher development and 350 million pesos for training programs. The wage hike is in line with what the administration has negotiated with other unions, but other parts of the package were quite generous -- likely an attempt by the government to woo the union before pressing ahead with educational reform.

Comment

16. (SBU) Calderon's and Gordillo's public statements this week potentially mark the first serious move toward educational reform since Calderon took office in December 2006. The importance of improving educational attainment in Mexico cannot be understated. While the country has made strides in improving its educational system over the past decade, children still spend comparatively few years in formal education, and do not profit from it as much as they should, so that poor educational attainment is reproduced from one generation to the next, and with it poverty. This is particularly true in rural, indigenous communities. Although SNTE has yet to fully accept this point, educators need to be held accountable for their performance in the classroom, and teaching methods need to be improved and made more flexible to adapt to students' backgrounds and learning needs. Moreover, inefficiencies and misallocation of spending need to be addressed, as does the powerful grip of the SNTE -- something that is unlikely to be fixed in this round of reforms.

17. (SBU) While getting the SNTE's buy-in on educational reform will undoubtedly water down whatever proposal the government puts forward, Gordillo's stamp of approval is a necessary (but insufficient) condition for passing reforms. The SNTE is too powerful for educational reform to be approved without its support. As an academic who has studied attempted educational reform in Mexico for over 25 years told

Econoffs, any attempt to directly work against the SNTE would be "political suicide," and reform can only be achieved through a pact between the SNTE and the government (Ref C). Visit Mexico City's Classified Web Site at <http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/wha/mexicocity> and the North American Partnership Blog at <http://www.intelink.gov/communities/state/nap> / GARZA